

## **Cycling and Walking Guidance Statement 2018-2022 update**

### **1. Purpose of the report**

- 1.1 The [Swale Cycling and Walking Guidance Statement 2018-2022](#) was adopted by Swale Borough Council (SBC) Cabinet on 12 December 2018. The aim of the statement and the associated action plan is to enable the Council to support Kent County Council, and other partners such as local Town and Parish Councils, to proactively respond to funding opportunities and monitor ongoing improvements to the cycling and walking network. As the improvement of cycling and walking infrastructure is the responsibility of KCC, SBC's main role is to work in partnership and to lobby and influence where possible for improvements.
- 1.2 An update on the first year of the framework was produced in December 2019 which was shared with Cabinet members and Kent County Council. Although updates on progress are reported every two months to the Climate Ecological Emergency Committee, a more comprehensive second year update was delayed due to other work pressures and the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the current progress of the Guidance Statement, which is due to expire in 2022, and to gather comments to inform the next version of the Statement.

### **2 Strategic background**

- 2.1 The Guidance Statement interlinks with several of the Council's other strategies and policy documents including the:
  - Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) 2018-2022
  - Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan (April 2020)
  - Draft Swale Transportation Strategy 2022-2037
  - Swale Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (August 2020)
  - Swale Visitor Economy Framework and Action Plan 2018-2023
  - Swale Economic Improvement Plan 2020-2023
  - Towards an Active Swale: Swale Active Lives Framework 2017-2022.
  - The Adopted Local Plan (Bearing Fruits 2031) and work undertaken during the current Local Plan Review.
- 2.2 The statement also supports the aims of Kent County Council's Active Travel Strategy and Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2018-2028 (ROWIP), as a strong walking and cycling network is part of the suite of measures which encourage a modal shift away from car usage.
- 2.3 These strategies will also provide the strategic context for the next version of the Swale Cycling and Walking Guidance Statement.

### **3. Swale Cycling and Walking Town Audits: Faversham and Isle of Sheppey**

- 3.1 In Spring 2019, the Council used funding from Kent County Council's bid to the Access Fund, commissioned Sustrans to research and produce cycling and walking infrastructure plans for Faversham and the Isle of Sheppey. Sittingbourne was not included in this initial project because the limited budget could only cover two areas, and the town's road network was undergoing substantial change at the time.

3.2 Sustrans initially reviewed the data available about each area, looking at planning and highways information provided by SBC's Planning Policy team and Kent County Council's Highways department. Sustrans also visited each of the areas to complete a survey of the area to inform their recommendations. The final reports were delivered in June 2020.

3.3 The reports have so far been used to inform proposals to improve cycling and walking in the borough. A number of the recommendations, which were judged to be the most cost effective, have been shortlisted from the reports so that they can be considered in the future if there are future funding opportunities. The audit reports have also been shared with local Parish Councils and Kent County Council to help inform their work. The reports are available upon request by emailing [cyclingandwalking@swale.gov.uk](mailto:cyclingandwalking@swale.gov.uk).

#### **4. Faversham Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan**

4.1 SBC also announced in February 2021 funding will be made available of up to £30,000 from the Special Projects Fund to commission, in partnership with Faversham Town Council, a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for Faversham.

4.2 The final Plan will draw on the findings of Sustrans' town audit and sit alongside the 20's Plenty for Faversham scheme which aims to improve the environment for cyclists and walkers (by reducing speeds). The Plan will be used to inform Swale's next Local Plan and Faversham Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan.

4.3 The Planning Policy team and Members are working with Faversham Town Council and Phil Jones Associates on the LCWIP for Faversham with a particular focus on the impact of future developments and how these will be incorporated into the existing cycling and walking network with links to the town centre, train station, schools, employment sites, services and facilities.

#### **5. Linking Coast to Downs project**

5.1 The Linking Coast to Downs is a part of the Interreg Experience project, which is a multi-agency partnership (across UK and France) of which the Kent element is led by Visit Kent and the Kent Downs AONB. Some of this work is also sub-contracted to the Medway Swale Estuary Partnership to take advantage of their resource and local knowledge. SBC officers also meet quarterly with Visit Kent and Kent Downs AONB to engage with and monitor the wider Experience project. The aim of the project is to develop cycling and walking routes which link the Swale coastline with the North Kent Downs.

5.2 SBC Cabinet members and officers meet with partners quarterly to help inform and shape the Linking Coast to Downs project. The project group is also helping to ensure that the project contributes something new to the area and does not duplicate any existing projects in Faversham and Sittingbourne. The project is set to conclude in March 2023 but there may be elements of the routes which will be delivered before then.

5.3 The project team has so far developed three provisional routes and is currently ground-truthing to ensure that they are suitable. There is funding in the project to make some small improvements to the routes, so all problems on public rights of way and areas where interpretation or direction may be required are currently being identified. A key component of the project is to create experiences which benefit the

local business community. The team are exploring ways to provide benefits for local businesses, such as for example cycle racks paid for through the project. The project team is working with Faversham Town Council as well to refresh the local food trails so that they incorporate links to the new routes.

## **6. Area Committees**

- 6.1 The Eastern Area Committee has funded a project called 'Town to Parishes', which is managed by Faversham Town Council. The project aims to complement the town's LCWIP (see section 4) and propose a set of routes for daily active travel between Boughton, Faversham, Teynham and local villages as well as making suggestions about how current connections can be improved.
- 6.2 The Western Area Committee also agreed on the 2 March 2021 to allocate £13,000 towards a Walking and Cycling Routes Project which could lead to an LCWIP for this area of Swale.

## **7. Natural England Coast Path**

- 7.1 Natural England has made progress in the development of the England Coast Path, despite some delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The paths in Swale are designed for walkers and will not be suitable in many places for cycling. SBC has provided information, advice and local knowledge to help inform the routes. The current update for each path within Swale is as follows:
  - The majority of the [Isle of Sheppey](#) stretch was approved by the Secretary of State on 12 November 2020, but further consideration is being given to a few areas. Where it has been approved, Natural England are working with local authorities to contact landowners about the infrastructure required. Once this is complete, new access rights will be brought into force along the route.
  - The majority of the [Iwade to the Isle of Grain](#) path was approved by the Secretary of State on 15 January 2020, with further consideration given to a few other areas. Work has begun with local authorities to make the route suitable for public use, including contacting the landowners about new infrastructure. Once this is complete, new access rights will be brought into force along the route.
  - The full route for [Whitstable to Iwade](#) was approved by the Secretary of State on 13 January 2021. Landowners in the affected areas are being contacted by Natural England about the design of the path, after which new access rights will come into force along the route.

## **8. Cycling and walking network action plan 2018-2022**

- 8.1 An [action plan](#) was also adopted as part of the Guidance Statement to help with the planning and prioritisation of routes and improvements, as and when funding becomes available.
- 8.2 A number of the actions have been completed in the original plan including:
  - To support the Faversham Recreation Ground Bid to the Parks for People Improvement Programme which includes the restoration of historic walks and improved footpath services along boundaries.
  - Commission a cycling and walking audit of suggested improvements in Faversham, the adequacy of current routes and options to improve connectivity with Canterbury.

- Commission a cycling and walking audit of the Isle of Sheppey to take into account changes brought about by new employment development, Lower Road improvement and connections to Barton's Hill Drive.
- To create a cycling and walking map of the Isle of Sheppey to highlight existing infrastructure, links to schools and links to visitor attractions. Explore Kent is currently designing a new map to cover Faversham and the Isle of Sheppey which is expected to be ready for the 2022 tourism season. SBC Cabinet Members and officers have provided feedback during the design process to influence the look and coverage of the final map.

8.3 There was initially an intention to revise the action plan each year, but due to the changes brought about by the pandemic and in active travel, both in Swale and the wider country, a more significant review will be required to identify the current priorities.

## **9. Questions for Committee Members:**

1. Do you feel the existing planned and proposed interventions are an appropriate spread of facilities for the borough?
2. Given that KCC has responsibility for cycling and walking routes, where can the SBC Cycling and Walking Guidance Statement add value?
3. What ways can we increase the promotion of active travel in Swale?
4. What are the strengths of the current Statement? Are there any weaknesses to be addressed in the refresh?
5. How aspirational would Members like the revised Statement to be – i.e. what balance should be struck between actions we are confident can be achieved and those we would undertake with a blank cheque book?